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What is Globalization to Post-colonialism? An Apologia for African Literature

Ameh Dennis Akoh

Globalization is easily understood as part of the continuing history of imperialism, indeed, of capitalist development and expansion. Have the imperial structures really been dismantled, even though the empire, free as they politically seem after independence, still writes back to the (imperial) center? This paper probes into the angelic posture that globalization seems to assume in its tackling of these complexities of identities. In this age of the clamor for national literatures and criticism, which is a fundamental principle of postcolonial literatures, will globalization automatically erode the idea of a postcolonial world and literatures? Is post-colonialism in its present phase and posture able to cater for the heterogeneous national literatures that it seeks to foreground or canonize? These constitute the frontline unease that this paper sets out to unravel; hence, the need to redefine the whole concept of globalization.

The Globalization of Knowledge

If the building of the tower of Babel was not conceived, the world would have probably remained one—one world, one God, one language, one culture, and, perhaps, one literature. The issues of slave trade, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and post-colonialism would not have been thought of or, if at all, would have taken different turns and approaches from what they now are. Since the collapse of Eden and the experience of Babel, different attempts have been made at globalizing the world, albeit not without diverse economic, political, cultural interests of the colonizer (nay globalizer).¹³ Thus, globalization has multiple origins.

But as an economic, political, social and cultural reality the active and clearly intentioned project of globalisation could be

traced back to the month of May of the year 334 BCE when a Macedonian warlord, Alexander the Great (336-323), with his great array of soldiers and military generals, initiated a grand program of unification of the Macedonians and Persians in one kingdom to make them one people and the dissemination of Greek language, culture and way of life among all the peoples of the earth (Udoette, 2004, p. 3).

Having copied this ideal from his teacher Aristotle and with the belief that Greek culture was superior to others, Alexander trudged on to establish his kingdom in the global village. This Hellenising mission made the young Macedonian king to make a law which made it mandatory for his military officers to intermarry between the Persians, Asians, Afghans, Indians, etc. The second phase of this mission must have been the period of colonialism and now, possibly, finally, globalization! This example is drawn forward because it is crucial to the understanding and position of this paper on the subject of globalization: that is, the present approach of globalizing the world is akin to the Macedonian example.

Its components include international trade, international investment, and international finance from the economic angle. This may be responsible for why its proponents see globalization as Africa's project of hope for industrial and economic development as if it is meant to *favor* Africa to develop. With all these, there still remain the increasing difficulties in cross-border movements arising from the politics of transit visas. Thus it will be suspect to claim that trade barriers have been lifted with the integration of world's major financial markets and cheaper and easier travel (cf. Anyakoha, 2003, p.1). It is no more a hidden fact that the so-called trade liberalization and interdependencies of national economies is all built around American economic interest as a way of strengthening her power. As Bade Onimode (2000, p. 2) has rightly pointed out, "the problems of poverty and rising global inequalities constitute the moral core of crisis of the present world system.... Why should some 20% of the population of the world persistently consume about 80% of the world resources?"

With the end of the Cold War and consequent collapse of the Soviet Union, the world is left with the United States as the only superpower; thus, "American hegemony has been the heart of unipolarism since the 1990s" (Onimode, 2000, p. 20). With this U.S. dominance and pressure on the rest of the world with her firm grip on the major United Nations organs, it is needless for anyone to think that U.S. hegemony is completely absent from the conception and implementation of the globalization idea and project. Globalization

can conveniently be said to be an extension of Pax Americana. This can be corroborated by the fact that:

The world economy today is a contradiction of the main principles of globalization. It is only the economies of the triad [U.S., Europe and Japan] that show evidence of more fluid capital movement at the expense of the Third World, except in the isolated cases of the 'Tiger' and 'Dragon' economies. (Attah, 2007, p. 3)

It is the opinion of many that, in globalization, Europe and the United States are now having their third and final lethal gaze at Africa, having had the first two through the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism.¹⁴ Now it will not just be another conquest but the final conquest when all Africa's culture and literature, would have been subsumed in the globalizer's culture and thought. Suffice it to say that globalization is the deepening phase of capitalist integration (Hoogvelt, 2001, p. 121). Otherwise, whose knowledge are we to globalize other than the globalizer's?

Globalization of Culture and Postcolonial Practice

Globalization is hinged on two things, namely compression of the world and global consciousness. This no doubt will affect national cultures and negate cultural boundaries. Like people, culture can be dislocated. Thus in the present arrangement to dislocate cultures, national cultures will give way to unipolar world culture within the framework of a defining center of power that will foreground one culture over the other. This arrangement again places us on the borderline of the "present," a present that makes our existence stand on a tenebrous sense of survival (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1). One is not unaware of the fact that colonialism dislocated the value systems on which the cultures of most African states rested. And between flag independence and the "announcement" of the globalization project the struggle to regain these dislocated values never did cease. While colonialism was a frontal, more militant system of conquest and overthrow, globalization is a subtle, more nihilistic conquest and overthrow of all peripheral cultures in favor of the metropolitan culture. These are the cultures that post-colonial literatures seek to foreground, cultures especially of African nations that colonialism had earlier eroded.

If the incursion of one culture into another culture's territory "may not always be to displace, destroy or dislocate but also to co-habit, or co-localize,

or mingle with the host culture,” as Ekanem (2004, p. 39) claims, the question may be whose culture would be the host culture or the intruding culture in the global village? This infusion of one culture with another, either of dominance or cohabitation is called deterritorialization. Does one then continue to ask if on a deterritorialized world all citizens shall be equal partners? As it is there seems to be what Homi Bhabha calls a “disturbance of direction” with globalization as “we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1). Is globalization then a transitory stage? It does not appear so in its present posture because the concept/project has already been finalized and only left for a consumer Africa to do the job of consumption. Does it allow for a fusion of cultural practices or difference in a post-colonial sense as Bhabha seems to imply? This also is not clear because post-colonial literatures do not include most developed countries of Europe, for instance. We are of the opinion that Bhabha’s “moment of transit” is a situation where the idea of the “post-colonial” would help in our search for a meeting point between center and periphery.

The suspicion with which globalization is viewed seems to be visited on post-colonialism in the realm of yoking a minor with a major, Africa versus Europe and the United States, periphery versus center. In the next few pages, this argument shall be clearer.

Post-ism, the Language of Empire, and the Politics of Representation

Postmodernism, with all its “post” variety, poses contradictory positions that negate the whole concept of globalization which has emanated from the same center of power. The borderline of the present in the language of Bhabha is strengthened by the current and controversial shiftiness of the “post.” Kekong Bisong (2004) has summarized Ali Mazrui’s (1999) idea of a postmodernity that foregrounds two contrary positions, namely homogenization (making all of us look similar) and hegemonization (making one of us the boss). Let me reproduce the tabulation verbatim:

Homogenization (expanding Homogeneity)	Hegemonization (Emergence of hegemonic center)
In postmodernity people dress more or less the same all over the world than they did in modernity	But the dress which is the same is overwhelmingly suits and jeans which are Western dress code
In postmodernity the human race is closer to having world languages than in modernity	But those languages spoken by more than 300 million people and in more than 10 countries are disproportionately European—especially English and French
In postmodernity we are closer to a world economy than in modernity	But the economy is still controlled by about 5 percent of the world population. The G-7 (United States, Germany, Japan, Britain, France, Canada, and Italy in that order of economic muscle)
In postmodernity the Internet has given us instant access to both information and mutual communication across huge distances	But the nerve center of the global Internet system is still located in the West

Source: Bisong, 2004, pp. 109-110.

Accordingly, the language of all posts- and of empire is best understood first in English and French before its final “posting” to Africa and the Third World.¹⁵ This Euro-American universalism has turned globalization (an offshoot of postmodernity) into a monopolistic and exclusively monumental Western monologue whose topoï and examples exclude peoples of other cultures who are usually only brought in after the conception of the original idea. This affects our application of these topoï to the explication of African literature. Now the term postcolonial has been applied to yoke African literatures with those of the United States and Canada—peoples whose colonial experiences differ in space, time, and attitude. Yet Africa must be made to participate within disturbed direction as it has been since the annihilation of the author (thanks to that apocalyptic announcement of Roland Barthes). And this, again, is where Odia Ofeimun’s “Postmodernism and the Impossible Death of the African Author” becomes critical to this discourse. When in a clearly postmodern turn Barthes announced the “Death of the Author” in the late 1960s, was he extrapolative enough to decipher the direction of African writers and African writing, knowing full well that the arguments on what should be called “African literature” were just gaining momentum? How do we marry postmodern deconstruction with postcolonial literary theory and practice?

All these questions need be posed if deconstructive criticism or reading of texts has anything to offer for our context. True, as Odia Ofeimun (1998) has asserted that Barthes may not have had the African author in mind in his declaration; Ofeimun recognizes, however, the fact that Barthes’ declaration poses that the “idea of practice without an individual source takes the form

of a creeping collectivism,” expressing, generally, a Foucauldian relish and assumption that the original source of a text is the language in which it is produced, Foucault himself having reduced the author from his lofty height to a mere conduit, or worse still, a ruse, as Ofeimun is wont to stretch it. It is also needful to add that Ofeimun’s reading takes a step beyond the purely metaphorical death which Barthes meant, for, for him the death of the African author could only be read from the fate he suffers—imprisonment, exile, assassination, etc.—in the hands of authoritarian regimes on the continent. This is a pure literal death! But Ofeimunian re/de/construction is simple in a way: African societies are both spatially and historically distant (in the sense of social and economic yoking) from those for which the “Death of the Author” has been hatched. In addition, there is the banal fact that African societies unlike their Western counterparts are yet to arrive at their destinations, which are still in the process of finalization.

This is part of the reasons adduced by Simon Gikandi (2001) for the absence of Africa from the theoretical configurations of our time. Again, while the African author is still in the dire search for an audience, the Western postmodern audience has been fed to have less history, less social responsibility, less commitment and more escape, or better still, false consciousness of the consumer society. Such portentous breaching of necessity in favor of freedom gives the West the say-so to produce a flurry of theories and anti-theories that declaim the death of the author. On these lie the source and strength of Ofeimun’s query. Thus, he concludes that if the author may be so unworthy as no univocal meaning may have been intended in the first instance, “what then makes the reader so trustworthy as a junction of meaning in a world in which a plurality of meanings for a text is recognised as norm(?)” (1998, p. 30). Unaddressed, this question is capable of engendering the next announcement: the Death of the Reader! And in a postmodern apocalypse, language as Ultimate Subject would overawe both author and reader.

Post-colonialism is part of the bid by the West to “include” Africa in the chaos of the post-ism. The West has thrown this at us in the same manner and spirit of the Jacques Derrida’s postcard. As a term, postcolonialism has today become elastic especially in the United States (its home of origin) so much so that it “has become inefficaciously synonymous with all forms of oppression and/or resistances to it” (Lawson, Dale & Tifin, 1997, p. x) and also often associated with marginalization and the differing anti-oppressive gestures. We must be quick to add, however, that the term is not synonymous with post-independence neither has it anything to do with an *afterness* but rather the persisting colonial legacies in “flag” post-independence cultures, not their

disappearances or erasure. It is rather part of the residue of British colonial culture in their former colonies.¹⁶ Robert Young's *Postcolonialism* traces the historical origins of the term to anti-colonial movements that began in Europe during the great expansions. For this reason of origin, he isolates it from the prolonged ideological debate. Yet one wonders if Young is unaware of the contamination of ideology on all literary theories; how then can postcolonialism escape the trappings of ideology? To say the least, postcolonialism is first and foremost, ineluctably, an ideological misnomer. As practiced in Anglo-American academy, postcolonial theory betrays an obvious obliviousness to non-Western articulations of self and identity which has engendered its tending towards their interpellation of non-Western cultures, which it seeks to foreground and defend into a solidly Eurocentric frame of consciousness (Majid, 2001). The theory, Majid insists, still operates the paradoxical tension of a continuous dependence on the secular European vocabulary of its academic origins to translate non-secular, non-European experiences. This is responsible for why most of its marked professors reside in the metropolitan urban centers of Europe and America.

There are three well-known representatives of postcolonial theory—Edward Said (founder of Anglo-American theory), Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, and the first theorized account on the subject can be found in *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin.¹⁷ Again, this is not surprising—the trio reside in the United States, thus the lumping together of Africa with countries that already have reached their destinations. In their position they themselves appear lost in the “post-colonial aura” and so must have forgotten or reneged on their original vision and mission. Their definition of “post-colonial” to mean all cultures affected by colonialism up to the present time and the inclusion, among others, of Canada, Australia and the United States, is not only suspect but also aberrant. It narrows to what Niyi Osundare has rightly described as “mocking the real wounds of the colonial inflictions where they are deepest and most enduring” (1993, p. 7). As hinted earlier, can one equate the colonial experiences and complexities of these countries with those of Africa? This, to me, betrays the weakness of the book from the beginning as an intellectual commercialization of some sort. This same position and trend of naming and misnaming appears to be the error among many African scholars as we readily pose postcolonial critic, postcolonial theorist, or postcolonial student. Thus all of us Africans—theorists, critics, writers, all—now seem “lost in the ‘bush of ghosts’ because even in their land they have become ghosts” (Ricard, 1994, p. 106).

I think also that there is the politico-economic angle to this, and it is apparent on the international scene. The United States, leading the cartel of the new colonist nations in search of this postcoloniality—and now, a globality—is now the champion of the so-called post-colonial discourse in her bid to complete the wresting of power from Europe—military, economic, intellectual—and establish her own hegemony over the world, with the complicit fellowship of some African and Third World scholars. Now to be fully heard or read and recognized the postcolonial theorist/critic must operate from the vantage Euro-American position! This would authenticate Appiah's very apt summation:

Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: of relatively small Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the West they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other, and for Africa (1992, p. 149).

Obviously, then, the idea of the “postcolonial” in theory is the result of the inability of Anglo-American theory to confront the complexities and varied cultural provenance of the so-called post-colonial writings. Consequently, in its elasticity, the term has produced a plethora of themes, including hybridity, border crossing, and polyrhythm, exoticism, Orientalism, the other, otherness and alterity, center and margin, English versus indigenous languages, nation(s) and nationalism, orality, globalization, etc., and these have received multiple attentions within the polysemic post-colonial space and for which the space of this paper is grossly inadequate to fully address. But we shall make some tangential attempts. As a term enmeshed in the politics of representation and “immigrant business,” post-colonialism has also been focused on from the angle of roots, rootlessness, and on being between. Salman Rushdie sees roots as a conservative myth designed ostensibly to “keep us in our places.” He explains:

When individuals come unstuck from the native land, they are called migrants. When nations do the same (Bangladesh), the act is called secession. What is the best thing about migrant peoples are seceded nations?(sic) It is the emptiness of one's luggage. I'm speaking of invisible suitcases, not the physical, perhaps cardboard, variety containing a few meaning-drained

mementoes: we have come unstuck from more than land. We have floated uplands from history from memory, from Time (Rushdie, 1984, p. 91).

This appears to be a major aspect of the politics of post-colonialism in relation to the matter of representation. In *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock applies her discussion of postcolonial theory to gender, race, and class which to her are not distinct realms of experience neither "can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego" (1995, p. 5) but they interpolate in their relation to each other whether in contradictory or conflictual ways. McClintock's position explains further after all the limits of experience expressed in feminist and postcolonial studies, feminism having betrayed some self-inflicted and self-reflexive contradictions before new song called postcolonialism. McClintock's application is also a fallout of the politics of representation embedded in postcolonialism.

Thus, in this representation, African texts have continued to receive attention in the post-colonial discourse as responses to the colonial experience of individual authors. Once these texts are so analyzed in their postcoloniality, they are done either to please its creators or as a helpless acceptance of the coinage. In "Syncretic Religion and Colonized Spontaneity in Soyinka's *Ake*", Jason Sperber places Soyinka's childhood reminiscences within a colonial condition that engenders postcolonial analysis. And I keep wondering if the mere analysis of the author's childhood reminiscences qualifies for a theory of postcolonialism or the emergence of it! Whether as a play, poem, novel, or actuality, the texts produced after the so-called independence all forcibly receive this post-colonial analysis. This is in spite of the subject matter of the piece of writing. In this light, a clear mark must be drawn between post-colonial (after colonialism) and postcolonial (the theory that undertakes the discourse on literatures of some continents or countries after flag independence).

To still emphasize, postcolonialism or postcolonial theory as a child of the politics of representation, is another bid at hegemony. When Ama Ata Aidoo puts forward the caveat: "Ask any village woman how post-colonial her life is" (Osundare, 1993, p. 7) one is wont to ask further: How postcolonial also is the life of the African city dweller? Or how post-colonial is the life or operation of the African critic or the academic himself? How come this terminology and naming when, ironically, the Queen of England is still the customary head of the Commonwealth of the so-called former British colonies? Except the word means something poetically different (which is yet unexpressed) otherwise there is as yet nothing postcolonial about the condition of Africa and her literature. Again, if the "post" means "after" or "following," it can be said with

pertness that what has followed after colonialism is not post-colonialism but a re-colonization of a more subtle and fiendish type hidden under the clog of globalization and exuded in the blatant show of military and economic might of the West. Why has the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank for instance become more powerful than any African national government today? It is obvious the powers behind the mask! Thus, the "postcolonial aura" (to echo Arig Dirlik) has once more thrown African and Third World literary criticism to the whims and caprices of global capitalism. Indeed, postcolonialism is neo-colonialism beautifully dressed by its inventors to look attractive to a consumer and bystanding Africa. For this reason and some others, the language of empire, as Appiah continues to insist, of center and periphery, identity and difference, the sovereign subject and her colonies, persist in structuring the criticism and reception of African literature within and outside Africa. This has also made the attainment of critical balance as well as clearing the space in the marketplace of theory in order to "mark" a difference appear illusory (Appiah, 1992, p. 72; 1991, p. 342).

But if one agrees with Peter Drucker (1994, p.16), describing the post-capitalist society, that anything "post" is not permanent but transitory and thus short lived, indeed having, in Bhabhan lexicon, a tenebrous sense of survival, the question then would be: Is globalization a subtle replacement for postcolonialism as brainchild of the postmodernist enlightenment and politics of representation? One really cannot predict the end of it even in this transitory post-ness other than the new world (dis)order that this christening has consistently invoked. This is part of the larger crisis of postcolonial theory.

And while we are yet to come to terms with a postcolonial theory that pretends to emphasize national literatures of the colonized and subordinated peoples and of asserting their indigenous cultural traditions and retrieving their repressed histories, we are "commanded" to globalize now or never what we thought was a literature of difference.

Postcolonial Literatures and a Globalizing World

Globalization will definitely encourage world literature; indeed that would be the basic idea, "a time when all literatures would become one" (Wellek & Warren, 1956, p. 48). This is Goethe's idea of *weltliteratur*.¹⁸ However, in an age of the outcry for national literatures especially in Africa, the idea of *weltliteratur* will amount to another death too many for the continent that has always suffered the loss of her cultural and intellectual traditions. As earlier mentioned, the destinations of African countries are still in the process of finalization. Even

the debate on what is national literature is still on in some quarters because of largely the gnawing problem of language. These are destinations we need to arrive at before anyone can talk of another step forward.

Again, I had put forward elsewhere the poser: What happened to Negritude? That question became necessary (as it is still) because the end of Negritude would have meant the arrival of Africa at her destination in her peculiar way the same level with all other parts of the world including Europe and the United States.¹⁹ As Jean-Paul Sartre puts it, Negritude for the African is the “ridge between past particularism—which he has just climbed—and future universalism, which will be the twilight of his negritude” (Ikonne, 2003, p. 81). If Negritude as a means, not an end, to a “prelude to self-accommodation of the black in a global raceless society,” then it is now glaring that neither African literature nor her culture is near her destination with the present beggarly position. However, I think what Senghor envisaged is not that African cultures should be subsumed in the universal civilizations but an arrival at the same levels with other civilizations. This is where globalization would have been meaningful to post-colonialism.

Postcolonial literatures celebrate largely a medley of issues of time, space, difference, identity, center, and margin, etc. At the risk of sounding sermonizing, let us have a break here and debate these issues and many that postcolonialism has raised in our search for a theory of African literature. Then we can globalize. Let's put it clearer. If postcolonialism as a theory of literature of the colonized emphasizes national cultures and national literatures, it would then mean that globalization as a project must break for a rethink especially to make Africa fully participate in the *negotiation* of this project. Thus, a globalized world should not be the end of African literature. Ikonne (2003, p. 91) continues to speak our mind as he counsels:

This, then, is the lesson from Leopold Sedar Senghor's Negritude as it relates to the globalisation of cultures. The black man, in his zeal for globalisation, should not let his object of quest spell the demise of his Negritude. His self-accommodation in the global festival of cultures should not become “twilight of his negritude.”

Interestingly, globalization seems to have exposed the fact that the idea of a postcolonial theory of literature that foregrounds Africa is suspect, having in its conception yoked African and other Third World countries with the United States, the leading capitalist center of the world. Like postcolonialism, the refrain in globalization is:

Capitalist States of the World, Unite!
 Less Developed Countries of the World, come in but only as
 Colonial and Neocolonial Capitalist Appendages!! (Onyekpe,
 2004, p. 332)

Conclusion

Globalization is unequivocally a lofty idea/project conceived with a diseased feet. Africa has always been dragged along by the West and made to contribute to a discourse whose conception she never was part of. Africa's contributions to such discourse have always been from the "underside" of history. For this to be happening in an age of the so-called liberalization is the worst, most subtle of slavery. In the same manner that Africa has been left in the margin of theory, or better still, outside of literary theory, by the imposing center-West, again, possibly because of our compromised postcoloniality, so also it is still happening with the concept of globalization. If one is not to be guilty of the same paralysis of "atrophy and repetitiveness" in our continuous search for this globality, the simple fact remains that Africa cannot, in her present beggarly position, move with the same speed and space as the West without being guilty of unequal yoking. How much more with the application of Western-conceived, Western-styled critical theories in the interpretation of African literature? Post-colonialism and postcolonial literary theory would need to revisit a *Negritude* that can help finalize Africa's destination, at a point where we can globalize.

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Endnotes

- ¹ On the accounts of Eden and the building of the tower of Babel, see Genesis chapters 3 and 11 of the *Holy Bible*.
- ² See Akoh, "The Crisis of Theory."
- ³ The French have continued to dominate theory right from structuralism to the present.
- ⁴ We have used The United Kingdom here as the "captain" of all colonizers and colonizing cultures.
- ⁵ Today there are many professors of postcolonial theory and criticism beside the trio of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha.
- ⁶ See Austen-Peters' *Topics in Comparative Literature*.
- ⁷ See Akoh, "The Crisis of Theory."